

STOCKTON'S TALES.

THE BEEMAN OF ORN, AND OTHER FANCIFUL TALES BY FRANK R. STOCKTON. 12mo, pp. 193. Charles Scribner's Sons.

The stories which have been gathered under the general title of fanciful tales in Mr. Stockton's little volume seem to indicate a straining of the peculiar humor which characterizes the author's earlier work. There remains in most of them enough of the familiar oddity to distinguish them from all contemporary work, but the machinery seems to creak and here and there one gets a glimpse of its working, which is apt to have a disillusioning effect. A few of the stories have an apparent purpose; that is to say, they suggest some truth. Most of them, however, are made to depend almost entirely upon incongruity and unexpected fancies, and as the narrative is generally both slight and meaningless the impression conveyed is that of rather forced efforts at funniness. The extreme simplicity and sobriety with which Mr. Stockton tells the most fantastical, grotesque and ridiculous stories are no doubt accountable for much of the fascination which his manner exercises. That peculiarity is not marked in the new volume to the same extent, because it is not reinforced by humor in the conception. Take for example the story of "The Griffin and the Minor Canon." The title is considerably droller than the tale itself. The utterly incongruous juxtaposition tickles the fancy as did Lewis Carroll's similar bric-a-brac of "The Walrus and the Carpenter." But when the title is read there is little humor in it. A griffin hears that a sculptor has adorned a church with a piece of statuary representing him, the griffin. He makes a journey to see it, frightens all the townsfolk, meets the Minor Canon, becomes attached to him, and after some very interesting incidents carries away his stone likeness, sets it up over his cave and dies, previously bestriding the Minor Canon. Now this is not funny at all. It is indeed hardly coherent enough to show a reason for existence. The humor of it is diluted to what humorists would dominate the thousandth potency. The griffin is not at all amusing, nor what comes of Mr. Stockton's story is a story to a group of children as a fairy tale they would be very apt to tell it stupid.

"The Bee Man of Orn" is perhaps a little more interesting because it contains queer whimsies and absurdities. But the central idea here also is so attenuated as to be all but imperceptible. In "Old Pipes and the Dryad" the author's fancy seems to have played more freely, and the conception is not without grace and pleasantness, while the absence of bizarre and grotesque figures is more than compensated by the introduction of as near an approach to the poetical as Mr. Stockton ever permits himself. That he might go so much further in this direction without doing worse is shown plainly enough by his present essay. "Christmas Before Last, or the Island of the Frigate Palm," is, we think, the best of the stories. It has more unstrained humor about it, and is marked by one of the author's pleasant characteristics—the habit of describing the most widely impossible things and doings with an unaffectedness of scientific exactness and scrupulous simplicity of diction. Nothing in his work is so captivating as this, and there are few better examples of it than the plan of the boy who had studied medicine for getting at the fruit of the Frigate Palm. There is a great deal of fun, too, in the conception of Captain Covel, the old merchant skipper whose stanch ship, the "Horn of Plenty," goes better stanch than the first; who thinks nothing of interrupting a voyage to send several months cruising for an unknown island that he may return to their home a boatful of truant schoolboys; and who was so fond of comfort that he had his poop carpeted at sea. The encounter with the pirates and the escape of the Horn of Plenty's company from these marauders are also very neatly done and in Mr. Stockton's best manner. "Prince Hassk's March" has some elements of drollery in it, but its oddities are hardly genuine and do not seem to have been arrived at spontaneously. On the whole the volume is somewhat disappointing and indicates the tendency to exhaustion which experiment in a new and not congenial field is sure to accentuate. In the line which he has made his own there is, however, no reason why Mr. Stockton should not score many more successes.

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